

Creating A Healthy Foodshed: Closing the Gap Between Health, Hunger and Food Production

An indication that our community health is in jeopardy is the seemingly paradoxical fact that Washington residents are both hungry and obese. Lack of access to healthy foods and to healthy lifestyles contributes to both maladies. While lack of coordination among the entities working toward healthier communities results in inefficiencies, gaps, and redundancy of effort.

- Food insecurity and hunger rates in Washington are top in the nation.
- Hunger affects children the most.
- Obesity rates have doubled over the last decade.
- 30% of the state's impoverished population live in King County.
- Rates of chronic disease and disabling conditions that are associated with poor diet and lack of exercise continue

A healthy foodshed means food production, access to food, health and wellness, and community and economic development are linked and coordinated to sustainably support the people who live in it.

to escalate year after year.

Unfortunately, these indicators are disproportionately prevalent in low-income communities, particularly low-income communities of color.

Furthermore, farms in the Puget Sound region are among the most endangered agricultural regions in the country. Growers in King County struggle in the context of increasing globalization of the food economy, and local economies are straining, especially in rural areas. Meanwhile, food production is generally so far removed from the people who eat, the eaters, that many no longer have access to fresh, local food, or knowledge of basic nutrition and food preparation. Often, foods available through emergency food systems are highly processed, lower quality foods.

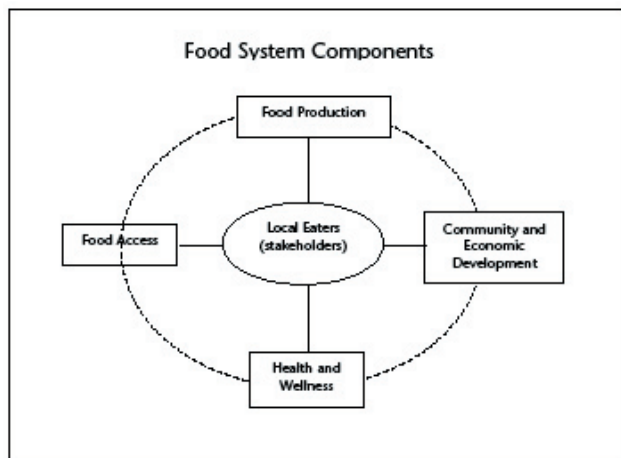
GOALS:

- Increased understanding of nutrition and healthy eating practices – emphasizing connections to food sources.
- Increased access to healthy foods -- people connected to local food sources are people connected to healthy fresh food.
- Healthier communities -- less hunger, less obesity.
- Greater demand for local farming enterprises -- local farms are integral to community development.

A Systems-Based Approach

Efforts to address food security issues can be cast into four major community sectors:

- 1) food production and sustainable agriculture,
- 2) food access and safety nets,
- 3) health and nutrition, and
- 4) community and economic development.



Unfortunately, connections between these sectors can be weak or missing and too many eaters fall through the cracks between all four well-intentioned community efforts. Each sector tends to focus on its own programs and funding concerns often leaving little time and energy left for working synergistically with the others. Although focused on the same need -- food security -- the need itself often takes a back seat to the immediate concerns related to programs and funding within each approach. A more effective and sustainable means of addressing food security requires strong and mutually beneficial connections among all food system stakeholders.

WSU Extension in King County is uniquely poised to provide a systems-based approach to education focused on creating a healthy foodshed. Current areas of work take place among all four sectors of the food system. Extension has the academic resources and experience developing community partnerships that is required to facilitate the systems-based approach needed to address food security.

Figure 1. Components of the food system are interconnected.

WSU King County Extension Food System Activities

Growing a Regional Food Economy

WSU KC Extension co-hosted an invitational forum to promote farm viability, food access, economic development, and environmental stewardship in King County in January 2004, in North Bend, WA.

Outputs: Over 50 food system stakeholders attended the forum and participated in working groups focused on 1) creating a food policy council, 2) making farm to school connections, 3) improving farmers markets, 4) developing infrastructure for farm processing and 5) creating a regional food identity.

Creating a Food Policy Council

Food policy councils examine and address components of the local food system including linkages between anti-hunger, sustainable agriculture, nutrition, and others and make recommendations for improvement. "A food policy is a decision made by a government institution which shapes the type of foods used or available as well as their cost, or which influences the opportunities for farmers and employees or effects food choices available to consumers" (statefoodpolicy.org). WSU KC Extension is providing leadership for laying groundwork to create a King County Food Policy Council: convening stakeholders, educating policymakers, drafting a proposal, etc.

Outputs: Two planning meetings have been hosted by WSU KC Extension to date -- May 12 and June 9 -- and a third is planned for July 22. Meetings have been attended by 20 diverse stakeholders including urban planners, nutrition educators, hunger advocates, food bank directors, sustainable agriculture advocates, faith based community advocates, county and state government personnel, fishers, and students. The WSDA Small Farm and Direct Marketing Program has contributed

facilitation and expertise.

Farm to School Connections

Serving local fruits and vegetables in cafeterias increases access to fresh foods that hard to obtain when eating away from home. Farm to Cafeteria programs can also increase the amount of fresh foods served in school lunch and breakfast programs. -- Sanger and Zenz, 2004. WSU KC Extension is partnering with area citizens, agencies, and organizations to support and implement farm-to-school connections.



Outputs: Connecting Local Farms & Schools: Addressing Chold Nutrition and Obesity Issues in King County K-12 Schools, May 13 in Seattle, WA. Over 100 people including food service directors, parents, farmers, community organizers and students attended this forum to explore opportunities for serving local foods in K-12 schools in King County. WSU

KC Extension co hosted the forum with WSDA Small Farm and Direct Marketing Program and Puget Consumers Coop. Funding provided by USDA Risk Management Agency.

Follow up contact has been made with individuals from 5 school districts as well as with area farmers. We are continuing with efforts to forge connections and provide informational resources to interested parents, farmers, and school personnel.

King County WSU Food \$ense

Cultivating Health and Nutrition through Garden Education (CHANGE) Improving nutrition of low-income residents in schools and housing communities by providing nutrition education based on gardening and cooking.

Food Bank/ Youth Shelters Improving nutrition of low-income residents by partnering with area food banks and youth shelters to provide nutrition education.

Do You Know Where Your Food Comes From?

What is eaten by the great majority of North Americans comes from a global everywhere, yet from nowhere that they know in particular. -- Kloppenburg 1996

A sustainable community food system, also known as a local food system, can best be defined as collaborative effort in a particular place to build more locally-based, self-reliant food systems and economies. -- Feenstra 1995



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